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AUTHOR Blankenbaker, Joe; Hook, Linda
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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the relationship of the choice of sport heroes to age, gender, and race in students enrolled in elementary, high school, and college classes. There was a strong relationship between race and sex and the selection of sport heroes. Age was related to the selection of heroes by the type of heroes selected by each group. Younger people chose charismatic athletes while the older subjects chose heroes of the type who reinforce the values of American society. (JD)

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THE RELATION OF THE SELECTION OF SPORT HEROES TO AGE, SEX, AND RACE

BY
JOE BLANKENBAKER
AND
LINDA HOOK

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Society often uses heroes as role models that reinforce basic ideals and direct individuals toward socially approved goals. Fiswick even suggests that heroes support society just as a pier holds up the bridge. The sport hero especially serves as a reinforcer of the basic values of American life. The sport hero is expected to behave in a manner that conforms to societal norms, preserves basic values, and contributes to the solidarity of the society. The features that make a sport hero are essential values of society, being a winner, overcoming obstacles, working hard, being an acceptable role model, and possessing a certain flair have been essential qualities for becoming a sport hero.

Many of our current heroes frequently do not exhibit the traditional heroic qualities. Smith suggests that what we have left is a collection of incomplete or tarnished quasi-heroes. Agnew and Johnson claim that many of today's heroes in fact represent counter-culture values. Certainly many of the modern sport heroes represent values and attitudes that are often less than exemplary.

Heroes such as Brian Bosworth, Jim McMahon, Reggie Jackson, and Mohammed Ali are representative of a new wave of heroes that often show little repsect for many traditional virtues. Smith refers to the heroes who exchew the traditional heroic qualitites as anti-heroes. Klapp suggests that these new heroes may encourage young people to bend the rules and resist the established order.

A study was conducted among several schools in southeast Georgia designed to show differences in the sport heroes of different groups of subjects. Specifically, the study was concerned with the selection of sport heroes according to age, sex, and race. As with any study of sport

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heroes, the results are affected by seasonal and geographical factors. A study by Smith conducted in Canada showed most heroes to be hockey players while this study conducted in Georgia revealed little interest in hockey players. The time of the year also influences the choice of sport heroes. Lists of heroes collected in January will show more superbowl players while a survey in the spring will reveal more pro basketball players as heroes. The data for this study was collected in January and again in April using students in four elementary schools, two high schools, and at Georgia Southern College.

A survey was completed in the fall that asked subjects to list some athletes that they felt could be considered sport heroes. A lsit of 54 athletes was compiled whose name was included by three or more respondents. The list was then distributed to the subjects in each age group with the instructions to mark the five athletes that they most admired and respected. The results revealed that Michael Jordan and Mary Lou Retton are the most admired and respected athletes. Tracy Ham, a local collegiate quarterback was the third choice of the respondents. However, the primary concern of the study was to determine the effect of age, sex, and race on the selection of sport heroes. The athletes receiving the most responses from the youngest group are listed below. The number following each name reflects the number of respondents selecting the athlete.

AGES 10-14

WHITE MALE		**BLACK MALE**	
Tracy Ham	94	Michael Jordan	57
Michael Jordan	75	Tracy Ham	37
Dominique Wilkins	54	Magic Johnson	28
Larry Bird	39	Dominique Wilkins	23
Hulk Hogan	33	Hulk Hogan	16
Hershel Walker	28		

WHITE FEMALE		BLACK FEMALE	
Mary Lou Retton	78	Tracy Ham	31
Tracy Ham	62	Michael Jordan	22
Jim McMahon	38	Dominique Wilkins	15
Chris Evert	37	Sugar Ray Leonard	9
Dale Murphy	25		

Examination of these results indicate that race and sex are factors in choosing heroes. The black youngsters were almost unanimous in choosing black athletes while white youngsters chose athletes of both races. Another striking feature of the data was the absence of female heroes especially for black girls. The white girls did choose Mary Lou Retton and Chris Evert, but the black girls chose only black male athletes.

HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

WHITE MALE		BLACK MALE	
Larry Bird	45	Michael Jordan	42
Hershel Walker	35	Dominique Wilkins	30
Jim McMahon	32	Magic Johnson	28
Michael Jordan	32	Sugar Ray Leonard	18
Tracy Ham	27	Walter Payton	16

WHITE FEMALE		BLACK FEMALE	
Mary Lou Retton	45	Michael Jordan	30
Chris Evert	28	Sugar Ray Leonard	20
Hershel Walker	18	Walter Payton	10
Martina Navratilova	15	Larry Bird	10
Jim McMahon	15	Tracy Ham	12

The selections of the high school students were very similar to those of the younger children. The professional wrestler Hulk Hogan received little support from this group. The racial and sexual patterns of the younger students are also very apparent for the high school students.

COLLEGE STUDENTS

WHITE MALE		BLACK FEMALE	
Dale Murphy	48	Michael Jordan	30
Larry Bird	42	Dominique Wilkins	24
Tracy Ham	33	Magic Johnson	18
Jim McMahon	27	Mike Tyson	17
Walter Payton	29	Walter Payton	16
Phil Niekro	22		
Jack Nicklaus	20		
Michael Jordan	18		

WHITE FEMALE		BLACK FEMALE	
Mary Lou Retton	101	Michael Jordan	27
Tracy Ham	120	Sugar Ray Leonard	20
Chris Evert	99	Tracy Ham	18
Hershel Walker	65	Dominique Wilkins	16
Dale Murphy	51	Magic Johnson	15
Martina Navratilova	48		

The results of the college students survey were similar to the high school students. The white males choices of Dale Murphy, Larry Bird, Jack Nicklaus, and Phil Niekro did indicate a preference for the establishment type of athletes that reinforce many of the traditional values often associated with athletes. An interesting feature of the collegiate data was the lack of support for the campus hero, Tracy Ham, by the black students.

POST COLLEGE AGE

WHITE MALE		BLACK MALE	
Jack Nicklaus	20	Reggie Jackson	14
Larry Bird	18	Walter Payton	11
Pete Rose	16	Magic Johnson	10
Dale Murphy	16	Sugar Ray Leonard	9
Arnold Palmer	12	Mike Tyson	7
Boris Becker	12	Calvin Peete	7

WHITE FEMALE	
Chris Evert	14
Mary Lou Retton	10
Larry Bird	8
Boris Becker	7
Dale Murphy	7

The selection of the older group revealed a much different list of athletes. The older group selected primarily the veteran athletes who had proven themselves over many seasons. The athletes chosen by this age group were primarily of the traditional hero type. No data from the black female group was given because the responses revealed no favorites.

The older group was asked to make selections of their favorites from a list of retired athletes. The results of this survey are given below.

RETIRED FAVORITES

WHITE MALES		BLACK MALES	
Joe Dimaggio	30	Jackie Robinson	18
Roger Staubach	23	Joe Louis	14
Vince Lombardi	22	Bill Russell	10
Mickey Mantle	21	Babe Ruth	10
Bear Bryant	17		

The choices from the list of retired athletes revealed a more consistent pattern. Nearly every athlete chosen from past years is of the reinforcer type. The choices reflect a more conservative attitude toward sport heroes. The athletes chosen displayed tremendous ability while presenting an image that was exemplary of American ideals. The choice of two conservative football coaches who stressed hard work, toughness, discipline, and a winning attitude certainly points out the image that former heroes presented.

CONCLUSIONS

The limitations of this survey are numerous. The results undoubtably reflect a geographical and seasonal bias especially as related to the individual athletes chosen. The small sample size restricts the conclusions and inferences that can be made. However, there are a number of trends that are suggested by the results.

The choice of Hulk Hogan as a most respected athlete by the youngest group is significant. The exhibitions of professional wrestling are not taken seriously by most adults but apparently are making a deeper impression on young people. The made for television matches glorify violence and demonstrate a complete disregard for rules. The stars of these not so innocent charades are unfortunately serving as role models for many children.

Females have only a limited number of role models in athletics. The female athletes that were selected participate in those sports that are socially approved for women. The survey of the black females showed very limited support for any female athlete. The choices of the black females were almost identical to the choices of the black males.

There is a racial effect in the choice of the sport heroes. The white subjects tended to choose white athletes and the black subjects tended to chose almost exclusively black athletes. The racial effect was stronger for the black groups and was in evidenced in every age group.

While the white subjects chose athletes from a number of sports, the black subjects chose primarily basketball stars. The black females also chose the black basketball stars. The basketball players that were chosen were not necessarily members of winning teams or established veterans. They ere the flashy "Human Highlights" type of players.

Age is a factor in the choice of sport heroes. The older the respondents tended to select athletes whose behavior reinforces traditional ideals. The data compiled on the former athletes showed former sport heroes to be almost exclusively from the reinforcer type of athlete. However, the survey did not support the hypothesis that younger respondents would choose the anti-hero that disdains traditional values. The groups of athletes chosen as heroes by the younger groups fell primarily into the category labeled by Smith as "charisma". These athletes perform their feats with a certain style and flair that sets them apart from other athletes. The determining criteria for becoming a sport hero appears to be not just playing well but how you play well. The selection of thse flashy, exciting type of athletes is most pronounced in data from the black respondents.

THE RELATION OF THE SELECTION OF SPORT HEROES
TO AGE, SEX, AND RACE
(ABSTRACT)

This study investigated the relationship of the choice of sport heroes to age, sex, and race in students enrolled in elementary, high school, and college classes. A list of 54 sport heroes was compiled using data from a preliminary study. The list was presented to subjects in three age categories(ages 10-14, high school students, and college students). Subjects selected the five athletes that they most admired from the list.

The results showed a strong relationship between race and the selection of sport heroes. Black subjects selected Black athletes almost exclusively (89% of their selections were Black), while White subjects selected both Black and White heroes (boys chose 43% White athletes and girls chose 74% White athletes). Age and race were also related for the White subjects. White males in the lowest age group selected 26% White heroes, White males in high school selected 39% White heroes, and 68% of the college age White subjects selected White heroes.

Sex was also related to sport hero selection. Male subjects chose exclusively male heroes. Black female subjects also chose male athletes almost exclusively (89% of the selections) while white females were more likely to choose a female athlete (62% of the selections). The selections of the girls were restricted primarily to three athletes-Mary Lou Retton, Chris Evert, and Martina Navratilova. The male subjects spread their selections over many more athletes.

Age was related to the selection of heroes by the type of heroes selected by each group. The youngest group preferred the athletes that perform with a certain style and flair that sets them apart from other athletes (categorized as charisma athletes) Older subjects chose heroes of the type that represent the traditional values of American society (categorized as reinforcers),